

# Indiana House of Representatives

---

## News and Information

*Media Office*

*Democratic Caucus*

*John Schorg, Director*

*Statehouse, Room 157*

*Indianapolis, Indiana 46204*

*1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621*

*Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**February 7, 2005**

### **REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – As we enter the second month of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, there is a great deal of activity throughout the Statehouse. The past two weeks have been active and there is much to talk about.

Education continues to be a hot topic. I'm sure you've seen the news about the governor's latest proposal to reduce funding for Indiana schools, a move that could cause program cuts, larger class sizes and teacher layoffs. The Indiana Department of Education has said it will not make deficiency support payments to school corporations, starting as early as March, and that it was highly unlikely the administration would make up the lost funding.

This decision amounts to a \$52 million cut in state support for local schools by the end of this calendar year. It follows the governor's proposal to "flat-line" school funding in the new biennial state budget, a move that translates to another cut in support.

If these proposals are implemented, they will hit very close to home. I recently received an analysis detailing which school districts would be the biggest "losers" in funding, based upon percentage loss. Unfortunately, three school districts that I represent are in the top 13 in the state: North Posey was second, Mt. Vernon 12th and Evansville 13th. I will be fighting to see that these proposals are not carried out since it will harm our students as much as any in the state.

Last week, I spoke about the importance of getting involved in the committee process. How that involvement can work was seen in the way the House Government and Regulatory Reform Committee handled legislation that would significantly transform the powers of the Governor.

House Bill 1188 was introduced as a means to eliminate most of the more than 300 statutory boards and commissions currently in existence in Indiana. One targeted for elimination was the Indiana Ports Commission. I believe this group has served our area well, since it helps oversee the Southwind Maritime Port, which has been on a record-setting pace for business.

Remember that most of these boards and commissions are made up of average citizens, like you and me. It seems strange for our governor to continually talk about getting the public more involved in government when he wants to drastically cut down one of the ways that Hoosiers can actually take part.

For this reason, I was part of the movement in committee to change HB 1188 to allow for a thorough review of all boards and commissions before any decision is made to eliminate them. A review process will enable our state to weed out inefficient boards while maintaining those that show tangible benefits to Indiana.

Here are other highlights from the past week in the House:

PHONE DEREGULATION – Members of the House Technology, Research and Development Committee heard testimony on a plan that would free major local telephone service providers from state regulations and pricing caps after 2010. A vote has not been set on House Bill 1518, but this measure has the potential to be one of the most controversial to be considered during the 2005 session.

2-2-2-2-2-2-2

Supporters of the measure – which include SBC , Verizon and Sprint, as well as the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana AFL-CIO – say it will spur more investment in telecommunications technology and broadband services, and help provide new products and services at lower prices.

Opponents of House Bill 1518 – which include the AARP, the Citizens Action Coalition and United Senior Action – say it will remove any state regulatory control over telephone service and lead to large rate increases for consumers, particularly those on fixed incomes.

OPEN CONTAINERS – Representatives approved House Bill 1057, which would penalize the driver or any passenger carrying an open container of alcohol in a car. Current state law only prohibits open alcohol containers if the driver has a blood-alcohol level of .04 percent or higher.

I voted against this measure for two reasons. The first is that if it becomes law, it would discourage the idea of a designated driver by making it possible for any driver to unknowingly be held responsible for the actions of his passengers. Secondly, supporters of the bill said it was needed in order to receive more of our tax dollars back from the federal government. This bill is just one example of how the federal government holds the tax dollars of the states hostage. By implementing this measure, we will receive more federal funding for road projects. However, it is my belief that this is money we should receive without having the federal government telling us what state laws we should impose.

ROAD FUNDING – The House Roads and Transportation Committee passed House Bill 1336, which would change the state's local road funding formula to include pickup truck registrations. Presently, the formula distributes funding to counties based on numbers of passenger vehicle registrations, meaning counties with large urban areas get a larger share of road dollars. By including pickup trucks in the formula, rural areas will get more road funding without suffering a gas tax increase. This effort has been undertaken for many years. If this change takes effect, Posey County will receive more road money.

As always, please contact me with any questions or concerns. I was pleased to see so many of you at the Poseyville legislative forum this past weekend. If you happen to be in Indianapolis, please stop by the Statehouse. I would be happy to show you around as it is always good to see a familiar face.